



**Maude Barlow joins with African water activists at the World Social Forum in Nairobi, Kenya, in January.**

starting to take note. On November 29, 2006, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) adopted a resolution requesting the OHCHR undertake a study on the relation between human rights and access to water. This resolution is widely seen as a step toward greater recognition of the right to water.

Canada's position has not gone unnoticed. In July 2006, the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights rebuked Canada for its position on the right to water, saying it "regretted" Canada's continued opposition, and called on Canada to review its stand.

## INVESTING IN FAILURE

Meanwhile, the forces of privatization are gaining momentum, and the impact is being felt close to home.

The Canada Pension Plan Investment Board (CPPIB) signed a deal in November to invest \$1 billion of Canadian workers' pension money in Anglian Water, a private British water corporation.

Anglian Water was created when Margaret Thatcher privatized Britain's water system in the 1980s, in what was one of the biggest privatization initiatives in history. If Canadians have any doubts about the harmful effects of water privatization they need only look at the record of British water corporations like Anglian.

In the first five years after the British water system was privatized, 18,636 households were disconnected from their supply. Prices rose by 50 per cent while directors' fees, salaries and bonuses increased between 50 per cent and 200 per cent in most water companies.

Anglian Water also has a deplorable environmental record. Since 2004, the company recorded the second highest

# A NATIONAL DISGRACE

## CANADA'S SHAMEFUL POSITION ON THE RIGHT TO WATER NEEDS TO CHANGE

by Susan Howatt

**T**he Canadian government has tarnished its reputation on the world stage by continuing to oppose attempts to enshrine the right to water at the United Nations.

At the World Water Forum at The Hague in 2000, in Kyoto in 2003, and in Mexico City in 2006, Canada

refused to declare water as a human right. And in 2002, Canada was the only country to vote against a resolution by the UN Committee on Human Rights to appoint a Special Rapporteur to promote the right to water, stating, "Canada does not accept that there is a right to drinking water and sanitation."

Access to clean fresh water is essential for people and nature, and the UN is

number of cases of water pollution in the U.K. In 2001, Anglian Water was fined for an incident in which 200 tonnes of sewage spilled into a river in Essex. In 2005, water companies were ranked as the worst polluters in the United Kingdom.

Over 16 million Canadians contribute to or benefit from the Canada Pension Plan, and poll after poll indicates that Canadians are opposed to water privatization. Yet the decision makers at the Canada Pension Plan Investment Board have chosen to ignore citizens' demands that the CPPIB divest its interest in water privatization.

## PROFITING FROM NEED

It should come as no surprise, though, that the big banks like CIBC see water privatization as an excellent investment opportunity. While those of us who consider water to be a fundamental right are outraged that governments have neglected water infrastructure, a recent report by CIBC points out that crumbling water systems in communities like Kashechewan provide a great opportunity for private corporations to make profits.

Governments have a responsibility to ensure safe and affordable access to clean water for all. A number of countries, including the British government, have now realized that for-profit water has failed and are taking steps to recognize the right to water.

Our own government must reverse its shameful international position and endorse the right to water at the United Nations. And with Canada's water increasingly in demand, it's time for a National Water Policy that enshrines water as a public trust and part of the commons.

**Susan Howatt is the National Water Campaigner for The Council of Canadians.**

# TAKE ACTION ON WORLD WATER DAY

**M**arch 22 was designated World Water Day in 1992 at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro to raise awareness about the importance of preserving global water resources. Since then communities, organizations and activists around the world have come together every year on March 22 to highlight water struggles and the need for clean, accessible, public water for everyone.

Last year, 43 Council chapters participated in World Water Day events, many in partnership with KAIROS and CUPE. These activities included potlucks, film showings and water ceremonies – and we hope to do even more this year.

There are many things that you can do to mark World Water Day on March 22. Here are some ideas on what you can do in your community:

**1 Film screenings.** This year, the Council of Canadians is partnering with the National Film Board of Canada's CITIZENshift project to make high quality documentaries on water issues available for screenings across Canada. If you are interested in organizing a screening in your community, contact us at 1-800-387-7177, or visit our website at [www.canadians.org](http://www.canadians.org) for more information.

**2 Walk for Water.** Organize a Walk for Water ceremony to commemorate World Water Day. For some inspiration, visit [www.kairoscanada.org](http://www.kairoscanada.org) to read about similar events that were held last year.

**3 Lobby your elected representatives.** Meet with your local, provincial or federal representative with the demand that Canada needs a National Water Policy that endorses water as a human right. Visit [www.canadians.org](http://www.canadians.org) for resources and talking points to bring with you.

**4 Work with teachers.** The Council has developed a World Water Day-themed lesson plan designed for high school students. Visit our website to download the teacher's kit, and meet with local teachers to encourage them to use it in their classrooms.

**5 Sponsor a municipal declaration.** Call on your local government to recognize water as a human right. Many activists have already successfully engaged in this work, but for more information on municipalities that have not yet endorsed the declaration, go to [www.kairoscanada.org](http://www.kairoscanada.org).

**6 Hand out leaflets.** The Canadian Peace Alliance has declared March 17 an international day of action to protest against the U.S. war in Iraq. There will be gatherings of activists across the country at this time. Use this opportunity to show your solidarity, and to distribute World Water Day materials. Visit [www.acp-cpa.ca](http://www.acp-cpa.ca), to find out about events in your community.

Visit [www.canadians.org](http://www.canadians.org) for more information on what you can do to mark World Water Day, including resources, action tools and upcoming events.